

CHRIS'LL DEAL WITH IT

episode notes




EP 41 - Principle #9 - Thoughtful opinions held loosely

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This is part 9 of our summer PRINCIPLES series. It can be listened to by itself, but for greater context refer back to the intro Episode #32.

Note that the principles in this series are what work for me. They allow me to thrive and live my values as best as I can. I'm not advocating the adoption of my specific set of principles. Rather I'm attempting to showcase the power of principles by providing more context on how they can be defined, codified, and embedded into the thoughts & actions of our lives.

Principle #9 - Thoughtful opinions held loosely

Where does the principle come from?

- I got the specific phrasing for this principle from the fantastic Shane Parrish, who runs the Farnam Street newsletter and Knowledge Project podcast.
- The root of this principle is the desire to be open minded.
- It's an acceptance that we don't (and can't) know everything.
 - And what we think we know could be wrong, or partially in error.
 - It could be clouded by poor context, shallowness of understanding, or the passage of time.
- There needs to be discernment and critical thinking brought to the evaluation of facts and ideas.
 - Respect the content of those facts & ideas.
 - But also the biases inherit to the source or the nature of the thing itself.

Why is it important?

- Consider all the ways our vision of the universe is incomplete.
 - The sheer volume of information, experiences, and hard-earned understanding we lack.
 - The vastness of everything we will never be able to witness.
 - This should be humbling.
- Yet despite this massive gap in understanding, it's important we share our visions. Our opinions, talents, and wisdom.
 - We should help shape the narrative of our tiny corners of the universe.
 - But the value of our perspective is no less than that of any other corners.
 - Realize they aren't corners at all, but tiny specks, open at all sides, free to flutter about and explore other specks. And be investigated by others.
- Consciousness is never tied to a single point in space or time. It's allowed to change and evolve through the interactions with other perspectives.

How does living it impact myself & others?

- Being open-minded leads to a willingness to listen, debate, and interact with someone else's ideas.
 - This is a vital skill to building stronger relationships and communities.
- We can vehemently disagree with someone or something without malice or denigration.
 - We may strive to hold our opinions loosely, but we should hold onto them when they're true to our experience.
 - But holding & defending are different: One is internal to ourselves, the other is entrenchment, the drawing of a battle line.
- The inability for many to take the time to listen to different perspectives leads to hurt feelings on a small scale, and political polarization on a larger one.
- We shouldn't seek to estrange or over-simplify our neighbors.
 - Again: Their perspective, however much it may differ from our own, has evolved from their unique set of experience, education, media exposure, upbringing, social pressures, temperament, belief, et cetera...

What does living the principle look like in action?

- Challenge your perspectives: Put in the effort to hear out the opinions that at first glance are vastly different (or diametrically opposed) from your own.
- Keep a healthy amount of newness in what you consume:
 - Read books in different genres once in a while
 - Check out a broadcast on the other end of the political spectrum
 - Ask for recommendations from someone with a vastly different perspective.
 - You don't have to do this all the time - and you can be skeptical as hell while you do it - but being opportunistic and honest about it can help you broaden your horizons.
 - Gaining a better understanding of others' perspectives can help you find similarities and connections with your own. You can then use these bridges and develop some common ground and understanding between people and ideas.

- A fun recent example from my own life: I recently gave romance novels a shot. I got some fantastic recommendations, and quickly realized that I enjoyed them!
 - I don't read them all the time, but I feel that I grew from the experience: Not just as a reader, but as a writer and a husband too.
- If you disagree with someone, don't attack: They have as much right to their opinion as you do of yours.
 - Instead, focus on sharing perspectives. Give them insight into yours and ask deeper questions to better understand theirs.
 - Aim to make them feel heard and respected. Even if their opinions have no impact on you directly, you'll gain a deeper understanding of them: Build that bridge!

Episode 41 Quote:

Today's quote is from the oft-quoted David Foster Wallace's speech *This is Water*:

But of course there are all different kinds of freedom, and the kind that is most precious you will not hear much talk about in the great outside world of wanting and achieving.... The really important kind of freedom involves attention and awareness and discipline, and being able truly to care about other people and to sacrifice for them over and over in myriad petty, unsexy ways every day.

That is real freedom. That is being educated, and understanding how to think. The alternative is unconsciousness, the default setting, the rat race, the constant gnawing sense of having had, and lost, some infinite thing.